

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, AR

SUBJECT: ARGENTINE JOURNALISTS COMMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

SITUATION

1. THIS MESSAGE REPORTS ON THE COMMENTS MADE BY TWO RESPECTED JOURNALISTS TO HUMAN RIGHTS COORDINATOR DERIAN ON AUGUST 8 DURING HER VISIT TO BUENOS AIRES. THE JOURNALISTS ARE ROBERT COX AND JAMES NEILSEN OF THE BUENOS AIRES HERALD. THEY SAW LITTLE IMPROVEMENT IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION.

2. COX'S ARREST. COX DESCRIBED HIS TWO-DAY ARREST IN APRIL, NOTING THAT IT CREATED A PUBLIC OUTCRY WHICH LED TO HIS EARLY RELEASE. COX SAID THERE WAS A PROMINENT SWASTIKA AT THE CENTRAL POLICE STATION IN BUENOS AIRES, WHERE HE WAS HELD. HE FACES A 2 TO 6 YEAR SENTENCE FOR REPRINTING A WIRE SERVICE REPORT ABOUT THE AUTHENTIC PERONIST PARTY, WHOSE MENTION IS BANNED IN ARGENTINA. COX SAID THE
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GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WISH HIM TO BE ACQUITTED, BECAUSE THIS WOULD UNDERMINE THE LAW UNDER WHICH HE IS CHARGED. AT THE SAME TIME, THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WANT ANY MORE PUBLICITY ABOUT THIS CASE. THE GOA SEEMS TO WANT COX TO

PLEAD GUILTY QUIETLY IN RETURN FOR CLEMENCY. COX SAID HE BELIEVES THAT GENERAL SUAREZ MASON WAS RESPONSIBLE

FOR HIS ARREST.

3. THE ECONOMY. BOTH JOURNALISTS FELT THAT ECONOMIC PROSPECTS FOR RECOVERY ARE EXCELLENT. COX STATED THAT THE RURAL AREAS HAVE NOT LOOKED SO GOOD IN 25 YEARS. THE URBAN POOR, HOWEVER, ARE MOROSE AND FEEL SQUEEZED BY WAGES.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS. THE SPANISH LANGUAGE ARGENTINE PRESS RARELY REPORTS ON KIDNAPPINGS AND KILLINGS UNLESS IT IS TO REPRINT OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS. NO NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S REPORT, WHICH THE GOA SAID WAS A LIE. THE HERALD DID PUBLISH EXERPTS. THE HERALD, A VERY SMALL PAPER, PROBABLY HAS RECEIVED AT LEAST 500 DOCUMENTED CASES OF DISAPPEARANCES ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE SECURITY FORCES. MOST ARGENTINES CONTINUE TO REFUSE TO BELIEVE THAT INNOCENTS ARE INVOLVED. THEY CLOSE THEIR EYES. COX SAID THERE HAS BEEN AN ENORMOUS MARGIN OF ERROR IN THE GOA FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM.

5. VIDELA. COX FELT THAT THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE JUNTA AND VIDELA HAS WIDENED IN RECENT MONTHS. LAST MARCH, THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUED TO ENJOY POPULAR SUPPORT; TODAY, VIDELA ALONE APPEARS TO ENJOY THAT SUPPORT. COX DID NOT BELIEVE THAT VIDELA KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED TO KIDNAPPED AMBASSADOR HIDALGO SOLAR.
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6. SOLARI IRIGOYEN. COX SAID THAT FORMER SENATOR SOLARI, WHO WAS RELEASED FROM JAIL AND RECEIVED BY THE DEPUTY SECRETARY, IS A PRINCIPLED, DEDICATED MAN WHO COULD NOT BE BOUGHT BY LEFT OR RIGHT. THE MILITARY HATE SOLARI, BECAUSE HE BLAMED THE MILITARY GOVERNOR OF TRELEW FOR MURDERING RECAPTURED PRISONERS AFTER A PRISON ESCAPE IN 1972. IN 1973, IN A COMMEMORATION OF THE TRELEW "MASSACRE," ALL THE OTHER SPEAKERS WERE KNOWN SUBVERSIVES, WHO AT THE TIME COULD OPERATE OPENLY. THIS LINKED SOLARI WITH EXTREMISTS. COX FELT IT IS A WONDER THAT SOLARI GOT OUT AND DUE TO VIDELA, WHOSE STATE VISIT TO VENEZUELA WAS CONDITIONED REPORTEDLY ON SOLARI'S RELEASE.

7. TIMERMAN. COX THOUGHT THAT THE GOA IS TRYING TO TRUMP UP CHARGES AGAINST "LA OPINION'S" FORMER PUBLISHER, JACOBO TIMERMAN. TIMERMAN'S NEWSPAPER WAS LEFTIST ORIENTED IN THE EARLY 1970'S WHEN THE PRESS WAS TOTALLY FREE. THE GOA MAY TRY TO USE OLD EDITORIALS AGAINST TIMERMAN, ACCUSING HIM OF TERRORIST SYMPATHIES.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. COX SAID THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO EXERT MAXIMUM PRESSURE ON THE GOA. HE CALLED FOR LITTLE PUBLIC CARROTS AND OCCASIONAL PATS ON THE BACK, ACCOMPANIED BY A BIG, PRIVATE FINANCIAL STICK. HE SAID THAT WE SHOULD SAY NO IN THE INTERNATIONAL BANKS BUT NOT USE AGGRAVATING WORDS. NO ONE SHOULD THINK THAT THE U.S. IS TRYING TO HUMILIATE ARGENTINA.

9. THE GOA SHOULD BE PERSUADED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS CHANGE IS IN ITS INTEREST. IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS THE GOA SHOULD BE ASKED WHY IT IS DOING THIS OR THAT. THESE QUESTIONS SHOULD BE ASKED CONTINUALLY. THE TWO JOURNALISTS CAUTIONED AGAINST DENOUNCING THE REGIME, WARNING THAT MILITARY HARDLINERS ARE STILL TRYING TO GET VIDELA.
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10. HIGH-LEVEL VISITS. COX FELT THAT CARTER WOULD RECEIVE A TUMULTUOUS WELCOME IF HE WERE TO VISIT ARGENTINA. THIS WOULD UPSET GOA WHICH WOULD SAY, "WHO DOES CARTER THINK HE IS?" COX OPINED THAT THE GOA WOULD TRY TO EXPLOIT OTHER HIGH-LEVEL VISITS ON BEHALF OF THE REGIME.

11. GOA ATTITUDE. THE TWO JOURNALISTS FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO SPEAK OF AN IMPROVING TREND. THEY POINTED TO THE FACT THAT MORE CASES WERE BEING TURNED OVER TO MILITARY AND CIVILIAN TRIBUNALS AS SOMETHING OF A PLUS. OVERALL, HOWEVER, THEY FEEL THE GOA HAS A STONE-FACED APPROACH. COX SAID THE ARGENTINE MILITARY ARE STILL FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF THE RED QUEEN IN ALICE IN WONDERLAND: "CHOP OFF THEIR HEADS;" CHRISTOPHER

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